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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS FORTY-FIRST SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

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Chapter ___

Moderator's summary of the panel discussion and dialogue on women and the environment

1. The Beijing Platform for Action[1] underlined that "sustainable development will be an elusive goal unless women's contribution to environmental management is recognized and supported". It called upon Governments and all other actors to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes and to ensure the necessary political and economic empowerment of women to enable them to participate fully along with men in environmental protection and conservation of natural resources.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes for sustainable development and in the implementation of Agenda 21

2. A holistic approach to sustainable development was crucial. Sustainable development could not be achieved without solving environmental problems, and environmental problems needed to be dealt with in the context of wider issues of human rights, gender and social equality, fair distribution of resources, and empowerment of people.

3. Agreements reached at the recent United Nations conferences and summits represented an evolving understanding of the links between gender, environment, population, and economic and social development. A cross-sectoral approach was

critical for addressing crucial interrelationships for achieving sustainable development. A further challenge was to infuse the development agenda with a human rights perspective.

4. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had represented a breakthrough in environmental awareness, including the drawing of attention to the important role women play in sustainable development. The subject of the inclusion of women as a major group in Agenda 21[2] needed, however, to be revisited in light of subsequent international agreements. The concept of women as a special group had been rejected at Vienna, Cairo and Beijing in favour of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all aspects of development. The series of global United Nations conferences following the Rio Conference had reflected this important shift away from women as a special group to women as key actors in all sectors of sustainable development.

5. The special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21 should take the results of other conferences fully into account and should employ a gender perspective in assessing the implementation in all sectors.

6. The importance of integrating a gender perspective in all policies and programmes was emphasized, including creating awareness of the impact of various policy measures and programmes for sustainable development on women as well as men.

7. The focus on women's empowerment and participation in decision-making for sustainable development should not divert attention from the importance of shared responsibility of both women and men, and the inclusion of women in decision-making should not be seen as a sufficient response to the need for mainstreaming a gender perspective in policies and programmes.

8. The importance of capacity-building, both internationally and nationally, for gender mainstreaming in sustainable development was noted. In this connection, training and advocacy campaigns were cited as effective tools for improving both gender and environmental awareness. Gender sensitivity training should be introduced across all the agencies working in planning for sustainable development.

9. Legislation at the national level should be brought into conformity with international commitments and treaty obligations, including, for example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.[3]

10. Resources for gender mainstreaming were too often taken from the limited funds available to women's ministries or offices. Part of mainstreaming would be to ensure that resources for bringing women into sustainable development were allocated from the budgets of other sectors and to ensure that these resources helped to integrate women-targeted projects into wider efforts for sustainable development.

Women's participation in decision-making for sustainable development

11. The relationship between women and the environment should be considered in light of the shift in focus from women as either victims or preservers of the environment, to empowerment of women both economically and politically. In view of the fact that women are not a homogeneous group, such factors as age, socio-economic status and race should also be taken into account.

12. The participation of civil society, women and men had proved to be essential for sustainable development. The reliance on top-down structures and decision-making and the creation of mega-structures often prevented participation by local communities and other actors in civil society in averting negative environmental impacts. Notwithstanding the cautioning that merely increasing the number of women in decision-making had not necessarily led to gender mainstreaming and better policies for sustainable development, evidence was noted that the participation of women and women's groups at the community level had a positive impact. The creation of a critical mass of women decision makers had proved to be an effective strategy for bringing about change in organizational cultures and policies. Structures and approaches that promoted efficient cooperation between the public and private sectors and between women and men in partnership had also been successful.

13. One of the ways to increase women's participation in decision-making for sustainable development was to provide women with access to education and training in science and technology.

14. The importance of alliance-building and networking among those women who were in decision-making positions was underlined.

15. Women at the local level often have specialized knowledge, traditions and interests that make them efficient managers of natural resources. However, this did not automatically put them in position to take critical decisions, given their often subordinate position in the household and the community. Their input into decisions on community resource management needed to be ensured through formal arrangements. Particular attention should be given to women in the agricultural sector where access to training, land and productive resources would facilitate their participation in decision-making for sustainable development.

Assessing the relationship between women and the environment and the impact of environmental factors on women

16. In identifying or developing technological solutions for environmental problems, it was considered essential to ensure that those solutions reflected the needs and interests of both men and women and that they were compatible with indigenous knowledge and local realities. Technologies that were inexpensive, easy to install and to operate, and consistent with the needs of communities, including women, had been highly successful. Solar energy was an example of a technology in whose development women could play a pioneering role. Transfer of technology should promote capacity-building for both women and men and include training for both groups.

17. It was suggested that all development policies and programmes should include a gender impact assessment along with an environmental impact assessment. It was considered important to assess in a gender-sensitive way the impact of globalization processes, privatization and liberalization of trade, industrialization, and export-oriented production in relation to environmental concerns. The impact of international and regional trade agreements on women should be examined as well.

18. The pressing need for research on the impact of environmental degradation on women's health, including breast cancer and other cancers in females was pointed out.

19. Information on technologies and pollutants should be made widely available, especially to women, so as to assist in the prevention of environmental damage.

20. The economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes of the last decade had necessitated the removal of subsidies on some products, like liquefied petroleum gas, with definite links to environmental degradation. Concern was expressed about the export of banned pesticides from developed to developing countries and the environmental impact on women and men.

21. The lack of gender-disaggregated data, indicators (both qualitative and quantitative) and research on gender impacts of environmental policies and programmes was noted. Efforts were needed to collect and improve data disaggregated by sex so as to better understand the impact of environmental policies and programmes on women. The lack of such data should not, however, be used as a reason to postpone mainstreaming of a gender perspective into policies and programmes at all levels.

22. The significant link between water resources and agriculture, forestry, and urban development was emphasized. The decline of water quality and the increased demand for clean water were noted. Local communities, especially women, should be given a more prominent role in water resource planning, development and management.

Notes

[1] Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[2] Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[3] General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.